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Policies and Benefits

Core Values help TDCJ staff achieve professional excellence

The citizens of Texas rightfully expect Texas Department of Criminal Justice employees to perform to the highest standards. As they deal with the hazards and difficulties encountered on the job, staff members are expected to demonstrate the professionalism and strong moral character expressed in the agency's mission statement: to provide public safety, promote positive change in offender behavior, reintegrate offenders into society and assist victims of crime.

In 2013 TDCJ created the Core Values program, which established Perseverance, Integrity, Courage and Commitment as the four guiding principles for agency employees to follow as they perform their day-to-day work activities. The curriculum was originally taught as a separate module in the Correctional Institutions Division's pre-service and in-service training, and has since been incorporated into every aspect of correctional officer instruction.

In addition to uniformed security staff, non-correctional department and divisional directors are trained on how to deliver the core value curriculum to their employees in a manner that specifically relates to the jobs they perform. Correctional Institution Divi-



sion Correctional Training and Staff Development Training Specialist C.F. Hazlewood, who oversees the Core Values Program, explains, "If you're talking about integrity to correctional staff, it's going to relate to things like count and use-of-force, versus teaching it to someone in Manufacturing and Logistics, where it's going to relate to their customer service and accounting practices."

Mirroring the agency's Code of Ethical Conduct, these core values serve as a practical guide for TDCJ employees. Hazlewood de-

scribes how the program relates to the agency's overall mission, saying, "Whereas our mission statement tells us what we do, our core values tell us how to do it. Core values provide a foundation on how someone does their job."

Perseverance is defined as the ability to exercise moral and physical strength to accomplish difficult tasks. A person possessing perseverance is dedicated, patient, determined and able to overcome pain, stress, fatigue and hardship.

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Integrity means doing what is morally up-right and proper at all times, even when no one is looking. Those who display integrity are truthful, fair, conscientious, respectful and trustworthy.

Courage is the mental and moral ability to overcome fear, make a decision and take action. A courageous person is confident, bold, resolute and adheres to the highest standards.

Commitment is the determination to put one's duty before oneself. A committed person is disciplined, consistent and exercises good judgment.

"These core values provide an objective standard from which you can operate, as opposed to a subjective standard which can change depending on how you feel on a certain day or how your day is going," Hazlewood continues. "If you're a supervisor and you're tired and don't feel like seeing any of your employees, you have to exercise your core value of perseverance, which means you push through the difficulty and commit to placing your duty before yourself."

TDCJ's core values were tested in May of this year when unprecedented floodwaters hit the Brazos Valley. Over the Memorial Day weekend, three CID units were evacuated, including the Stringfellow Unit, with its parking lots and officer-housing areas submerged under a foot of water. After all offenders were transferred to other units, operations were

temporarily moved to one of four buildings at the Ramsey Training Facility in Rosharon, each of which has a core value painted on the door.



Flooding at the Stringfellow Unit in May, 2016.

Stringfellow Unit Warden Wayne Brewer describes this as a tough time for he and his staff, "Officers were working 12- to 18-hour shifts a day. Some had lost their cars, some their homes. Some only had the uniforms on their backs. I was tired and they were tired." Locking the doors of the Stringfellow Unit and heading to the Ramsey Training Facility to conduct turnout, Brewer felt he was at his lowest saying, "I was a beat man. I felt like I had failed. I never imagined I'd lock the doors of a unit."

Walking into the meeting, he expected to have to give his staff a pep talk in order to boost their spirits, but what he saw surprised him. "As I'm walking to turnout, I see 'Perseverance' on the door and my staff, they're all upbeat! They're talking about the basketball game. To me, that was the perfect example of perseverance. With everything they went through, losing their vehicles, working hour

after hour . . . it picked me up." Crediting his staff on their professionalism, he continued, "All of the core values are evident in a situation like this. Along with perseverance, you have to have courage, commitment and integrity as well."

By applying these core values to their daily routine, employees are creating an environment that holds everyone to the highest agency standards. Hazlewood explains, "When someone holds to their core values, what they're doing is being the kind of leader and role model the agency wants them to be." ●